Food Guidelines? How much is a serving? [1]

Alice,

Is there a chart that lists how much of various foods constitute a "serving" under the new food guidelines?

? Trying to eat healthy

Answer

Dear Trying to Eat Healthy,

Knowing what and how much to eat can feel overwhelming. In recognition of the fact that more Americans are overweight and obese than ever before, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regularly reviews and updates the food guide recommendations. The newest update by "Choose My Plate" and makes suggestions based on age, gender, and activity level. It no longer recommends amounts of food in terms of serving size, but rather suggests portions according to actual weights and amounts of specific foods. You can learn more about how to apply the new food guide recommendations to your lifestyle at ChooseMyPlate.gov [2].

Even though there is no single chart that details how much of a particular food constitutes a serving, you can click on each food group's heading (see below) for more information on common portion sizes. Also, here's a basic breakdown of the guidelines:

Grains [3]  
One serving equals 1 slice of bread; 1/2 cup of cooked rice, pasta, or cereal; or 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal. All of these serving sizes are known as "ounce equivalents" in Choose My Plate-speak.

As a general rule of thumb,  
1 serving size/ounce equivalent of bread = plastic compact disc (CD) case  
2 servings/ounce equivalents of cooked brown rice = a tennis ball

Vegetables [4]  
Unlike the Grains group described above, cup size matters when it comes to vegetables. That is, vegetables servings are measured in cups rather than ounces. One serving equals 1/2 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice or 1 cup of leafy raw vegetables.

1 serving size = 1/2 cup of broccoli = a light bulb
1 serving size = 1/2 cup of potato = a computer mouse

**Fruits** [5]
Like the vegetable group, cup size matters here, too. One serving equals 1 cup of fruit or 100 percent fruit juice, or 1/2 cup of dried fruit. Because fruits come in so many different shapes and sizes, it's hard to say how many pieces of fruit count as a serving.

Generally, 1 serving size of whole fruit = 1 tennis ball
1 serving size of cut fruit = 7 cotton balls

**Dairy** [6]
One serving equals 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1.5 to 2 ounces of cheese, and even 1.5 cups of ice cream. Choose low-fat options from this group whenever possible.

1 serving size of cheese = 2 9-volt batteries

**Protein** [7]
Like the Grains group, serving sizes are also measured in ounce equivalents. One serving or ounce equivalent equals 1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1/4 cup cooked beans; 1 egg; 1 tablespoon of peanut butter; or 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds.

3 servings/ounce equivalents of fish = 1 checkbook
3 servings/ounce equivalents of meat or poultry = 1 deck of cards
2 servings/ounce equivalents of peanut butter = 1 roll of 35 mm film or 1 ping-pong ball

**Oils** [8]
Choosemyplate.gov measures serving sizes in teaspoons.

1 serving/teaspoon of margarine and spreads = 1 dice
2 serving/teaspoons of salad dressing = 1 thumb tip

Because these oils are found in many of the foods we eat, there may not be a need to add this group to your diet. For example, half of a medium avocado or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter provide 3 and 4 teaspoons or servings of oil respectively, while also counting towards your vegetable or nuts allowance.

Remember, also, that most portions in the U.S. are oversized and contain several servings of the recommended categories. Ideally you want most of your food to be whole grains, plenty of fruits and vegetables, low-fat calcium fortified foods (such as milk and cottage cheese), and lean sources of protein (such as fish, turkey, and chicken).

If you're hungry for more information on dietary recommendations, check out the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* [9] and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics? Food and Nutrition Information web site [10].

Alice!
Category:
Optimal Nutrition [12]
Healthy Eating [13]